Vital Registrations at the Turn of the 20th Century
A Comparison between Parish and Civil Records in Transylvania After 1895

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The civil status parish registers provide complex information for the researcher and can be successfully used, being recommended for usage for the period after 1895 as well, in order to complete the information from the civil registers.

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CIVIL, PARISH or state registers are first-rank sources for historical demography, successfully answering, at the same time, a lot of research questions in the area of social history. In Transylvania, like in all eastern regions of the Habsburg Empire, the civil laws regarding matrimonial life were only introduced in 1895 (by the Civil Laws XXX–XXXIII). Until that date, the records of private life events (births, marriages, deaths, and even divorces) used to be kept by the priests (churches). The parish registers drawn up before these laws were enacted preserved their status as legal documents, their holders being entitled and mandated to continue issuing public authenticity certificates for the events recorded in that way before 1895. Although churches were to continue keeping their own records, henceforth these ceased to be legal, official documents, being considered simple domestic sources of the entities in question. The re-

gistration of marriages, deaths and other life events was enancted by the *Rituale Romanum* in 1614, issued by Pope Paul V. In 1625, the order was published in Hungary by the Archbishop of Strigonium (Esztergom), Péter Pázmány, and ever since that year parish records were kept in Transylvania. One after the other, the denominations began to record the life events (births, marriages and deaths), and the priests operated as state officials—at a time when the state-church dualism provided the necessary management and social control mechanisms—until the end of the 19th century, when, amid massive secularization processes, the church was deprived of its registration and control prerogatives, the religious approval for any life event becoming a matter of individual choice, and only the papers recorded by the civil status officer—skilled and paid by the government—had legal value. Enough information has been provided in writing about the reason behind the introduction of this type of civil status registration, the evolution of the type of registrations according to confession (denomination), the information they contained and the type of analyses they allowed, and therefore a summary thereof is not required.[1] In the past few years, the Historical Population Database of Transylvania (HPDT)[2] has been built based on these documents, completed each year with new data collected from the civil status parish registers.[3]

The design and architecture of the database as well as the process of entering the parish records into the database obviously led to the question about how we relate, from the perspective of the sources,[4] to 1895, with the move to civil registrations and the collection of information about the individual life course. A quick survey of the form of the registration certificates, made possible by some localities for which we have had the relevant information, has shown that for a database built in keeping with the source-oriented principle, it is difficult to match the information from the new certificates, as new tables should be designed, relations and functions should be found to help link the information, consequently excluding the possibility that official civil status records could be used as sources after 1895 in HPDT form. What is nevertheless left is the question about the difference between the two types of sources, beyond the issuers/authors of these sources. As a result, this study is meant to answer the following research questions: What additional information do these registrations provide? Is it possible to identify benefits/disadvantages in the case of civil registration compared to church registration? How is the information set? What kind of information is factored in? Who does the declaring and how? Which type of source is more complex?

In order to answer these questions, we have chosen a 5-year sample, between 1895 and 1900, therefore immediately after the civil status registration was enacted, for which we have compared the civil and the parish records of the popu-

lation from Ocna-Dej (Désakna, Salzdorf)—the former drafted and kept by the priests of the various denominations, the latter by the status officers.

Registrations and Records

THE FIRST difficulty which the researchers have had to face is that, for an exhaustive comparison, they have to take all parish records of the communities cohabiting in Ocna-Dej and overlap these data with the civil records of the commune, organized chronologically and, of course, without the denominational variable having a role in organizing the information. According to the census of 1900, Ocna-Dej had 2,303 inhabitants, of which 1,331 Romanians, 944 Hungarians, and 24 Germans.[5] Given that the parish records used to list the population according to the religious denomination, we are interested in laying out these ethnic groups according to the confessional criterion. Therefore, 1,337 Greek Catholics, 137 Roman Catholics and a community of 802 Reformed were present in 1900. The parish registers which we include within the analysis belong, consequently, to the Reformed, Catholic, and Greek Catholic denominations. The census also certifies the existence of 23 Israelites, 2 Unitarians and 3 Evangelicals, but the data regarding these confessions is not included in this analysis as, even if we can find recordings of their life events within the officer papers of the commune, we have not found the registers of the religious communities in which their life events had been previously written down.

Information Structure and Organization

THE CIVIL status parish registrations are, as suggested in their name, registrations containing in one file records of several events of the same type (thus, there are separate entries for baptism, marriage and death, but sometimes all three events are recorded in one entry, divided into three parts, a case in which we have protocols), provided, most of the times, in the chronological order of their recording. The information is organized in tables, on several columns, with a table header comprising the data which the priests were supposed to fill in. Towards the end of the 19th century, the table structure was very well organized—in contrast with the previous decades, when registers with no columns or column bottoms allowed the priests to fill in only what they regarded as relevant, the researchers of today lacking valuable information for piecing together the life-course and a more complex social history based on

these sources—providing a series of pre-established answers, in order to reduce the free text put in by the church staff. Even if, many times, the priests devised the table headers according to their own comprehension capacity and their own needs—which explains the registration variations—we can state that upon moving to the civil recording, the registrations contained or should have contained, according to their boxes, detailed information on the events recorded.

Fig. 1. Table header for civil status parish registration, the baptised, Ocna-Dej

SOURCE: Arhivele Naționale—Serviciul Judeţean Cluj (National Archives—Cluj County Service) (hereafter cited as SJAN Cluj), Parish Registrations Collection, Ocna-Dej, 177 (12).

Fig. 2. Parish registration page for the baptised, Ocna-Dej (1895)

SOURCE: SJAN Cluj, Parish Registrations Collection, Ocna-Dej, 177 (12).

FIG. 3. RECORDING THE BIRTH, CIVIL REGISTRATION OCNA-DEJ

It emerges that the information required to be filled in by the priest within this type of baptism registration starting with 1895 referred to: on the left page, the date of birth and the date of baptism (the older registrations only requested the date of baptism), the surname and the first name of the registered, the place of birth, with street and house number, the gender (two columns box, separate for legitimate and illegitimate births, in which the priest just had to tick the right box), columns in which the twin or triplet births would be also ticked, as well as the case in which the infant was stillborn, while on the right page there is information related to the parents—surname, first name (coname), religion and status (defined, most of the times, by occupation) information on godparents (just the surname, the name and the religion), on the priest doing the baptism and the anointment, the midwife assisting in the birth, information on vaccines (who did the vaccination—*ultuirea*—and when) and an observations column.

Law XXXIII of 1894 entered into force on 1 October 1895 and the first registration within the births register of Ocna-Dej dates back to 6 October 1895. As shown in the picture below, an excerpt from the first registration certificate in the locality, the information is organized into six separate categories: the former refers to the place, the date of filling in/declaring the event, the people present upon filling in the document (the civil status officer and the affiant, the child's father, in this case). All this information is displayed as a preamble to the subsequent one, set on four separate levels, indicated by brackets, as follows: the first column refers to the legitimate father, containing information on surname and first name, confession, occupation, place of birth and residence, and age. The next column features information on the mother, following the same pattern. The third set contains information regarding the birth: the place of occurrence, the date (year, month, day, time). The fourth column refers to the newborn baby: gender, confession, first name. The certificate also contains an observations column—in this case mentioning the midwife's name, and this piece of information may allow the researcher to assess the availability of/recourse to professional medical services, like giving birth in a hospital.

The last column of the certificate confirms that the information has been read and explained to the affiant and assumes the signatures of the two parties involved, of the officer and of the birth affiant, i.e. the child's father.

The comparative quantitative analysis of the registrations of all three confessional communities and of the civil registration shows minor recording differences. Thus, if the baptism registrations of the three communities recorded, within 1895–1901, a number of 496 baptism events, the civil registration of Ocna-Dej records, during the same time, 476 newborn babies, of which four belonged to the Israelite confession and one to the Unitarian one. Consequently, for 25 newborn babies, the birth was not registered with the civil status officer.

A piece of information which does not appear in the civil registration refers to the legitimacy of the newborn, an issue present in the confessional registrations.

Marriage Registers

A S CONCERNS marriages, although the number of registered marriages is almost identical, respectively 102 marriages within both types of recordings, their nominal analysis has shown that, despite the coincidence in the total number of recordings, the composition of the registered groups is slightly different. For instance, if in 1897 the church registrations of the three confessions recorded 22 marriages, the civil status registration recorded only 18 marriages, of which three, belonging to the Greek Catholics, were not recorded with the church. Consequently, at the beginning of the registration by the civil authorities, there were registration cases either only with the church or only with the civil status office.

FIG. 4. HEADER FOR MARRIAGE REGISTRATION, REGISTRATION BOOK OF THE MARRIED FROM THE GREEK CATHOLIC PARISH, OCNA-DEJ, 1895–
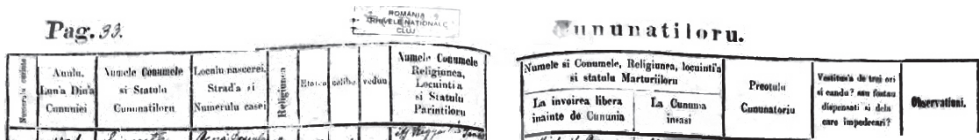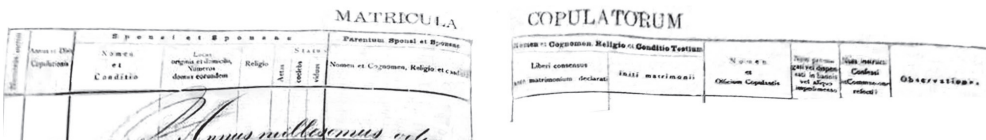

SOURCE: SJAN Cluj, Parish Registrations Collection, Ocna-Dej, 177 (13).

FIG. 5. HEADER FOR MARRIAGE REGISTRATION, OCNA-DEJ, REFORMED, 1895–

SOURCE: SJAN Cluj, Parish Registrations Collection, Ocna-Dej, 177 (15).

FIG. 6. HEADER FOR MARRIAGE REGISTRATION, OCNA-DEJ, ROMAN CATHOLIC, 1895–

SOURCE: SJAN Cluj, Parish Registrations Collection, Ocna-Dej, 177 (18).

The records for the three denominations mostly require the same type of information, as shown in figures 4, 5 and 6.

As concerns the Greek Catholics (fig. 4), the data on the event and individuals is required as follows: year, month and day of the marriage; name, coname and status of the married; place of birth, street and house number; religion, age, single/widowed; name, coname, religion, residence and status of parents; name, coname, religion, residence and status of witnesses: upon the open agreement before marriage and on marriage; the priest performing the marriage; the three announcements, waivers and their type. The last column is for observations, respectively any considerations the priest may have had to make about the recorded event.

The registration of the Reformed community (fig. 5) requires filling in the following information: year and day of marriage; information on the bride and bridegroom: name and status, place of birth and domicile with house number, religion, age, civil status—bachelor or unmarried girl, widower/widow, legally divorced; name and status of the bride's and bridegroom's parents; name and status of witnesses; the officiant; whether the announcements were made or waivers from them or other impediments occurred; observations. Compared to the Greek Catholic registration, here we have data regarding the divorced status, even without witnesses, if applicable.

Within the Catholic community registration, written in Latin, the data required is, mostly, the same as that for the Greek Catholic one, including the presence of witnesses, the only column with a difference referring to the confession, the eucharist and the training of the young (*Num instructi Confessi et Communione refecti*).

The civil registration of marriages, as seen in fig. 7, contains mostly the same information from the parish records. The first registration after the introduction of the new civil laws dates back to 23 November 1895—one day from the Christmas Fast, if we are to relate to the cyclical nature of the events in people's lives, marked by the religious and the farming calendar—and concerns a marriage between Greek Catholics (a relevant detail only for comparing the type of information required by the two registrations, civil and ecclesiastic, as after the transition to the civil laws the documents contain the same columns, irrespective of the confession of those present before the officer). The information is provided, just like in the case of birth registrations, on several levels: the first, with reference to the venue and the date of the event, then to the one taking over the information ("Gyula Vajda came before me") as bridegroom—and this block offers information on the bridegroom's surname and first name, his religion and occupation, the place and date of birth, as well as the fact that he is known to the officer. Then, on the next level, there is data on the parents, listing their occupa-

tion and address. The second set of information, marked as such, refers to the bride—just like in the bridegroom's case, with no difference. On the opposite page, there is information on the marriage witnesses, two of them, complying with the same order, and mentions the free consent, attesting to the fact that the two of them were separately questioned before witnesses as to whether they want to get married or not. The next line shows that, based on the positive answer of the bride and bridegroom, the marriage was concluded in keeping with the legal provisions.

It is specified that the act was read out and explained in the mother tongue of the bride and groom. It is acknowledged that both witnesses are male. An extremely interesting detail is found in the last column of the document, which contains the signatures of the participants to the event, in the following order: witnesses, bride and groom, and the civil status officer. This detail is related to the manner of establishing the woman's name after marriage, a topic previously[6] tackled based on the substantial data from the HPDT showing that after marriage, in the key moments of her life (upon childbirth, when she christens or weds, until death) the woman continues to be mentioned in the community by her maiden name. An assumption of the signatures on the marriage civil paper brings us close to an explanation regarding this habit of perpetuating the maiden name: an assumption by acculturation by the Romanian communities and their cultural intermediaries of the habits of the neighboring ethnic communities.

For centuries, Hungarian women had adopted not only their husband's family name, but also their full name adding the suffix "né" to the husband's given name. In this specific case, Zsuzsanna Zsikisán married János Kis and became Jánosné Kis—in other words, as Hungarian historians stated,[7] she appeared after marriage merely as an appendage of her husband. Initially, the suffix had the phonetic format of the noun nő (wife). Its derivative function emerged in the 16th century and consolidated in the following centuries. Just like in the case of the marriage registers, a lack of signature shows the illiteracy of the people.

Although, at first sight, the data collected with regard to the event seems more substantial within the civil registrations, we notice, at least for the first years after the implementation of the civil legislation, the absence of the information on the civil status of the bride and groom, an extremely relevant indicator for the individual life course analyses, but also for the process of family restoration. Also, the civil registrations introduced a levelling needed to manage the civil status, only mentioning the witnesses to the marriage, two of them, while the parish registers, drafted and printed by the church authorities according the customs of each individual community, provide information such as data on the godparents, important characters within the Orthodox denomination, extremely useful for the analysis of the formation of social networks.

FIG. 7. MARRIAGE REGISTRATION, CIVIL REGISTRATION OCNA-DEJ
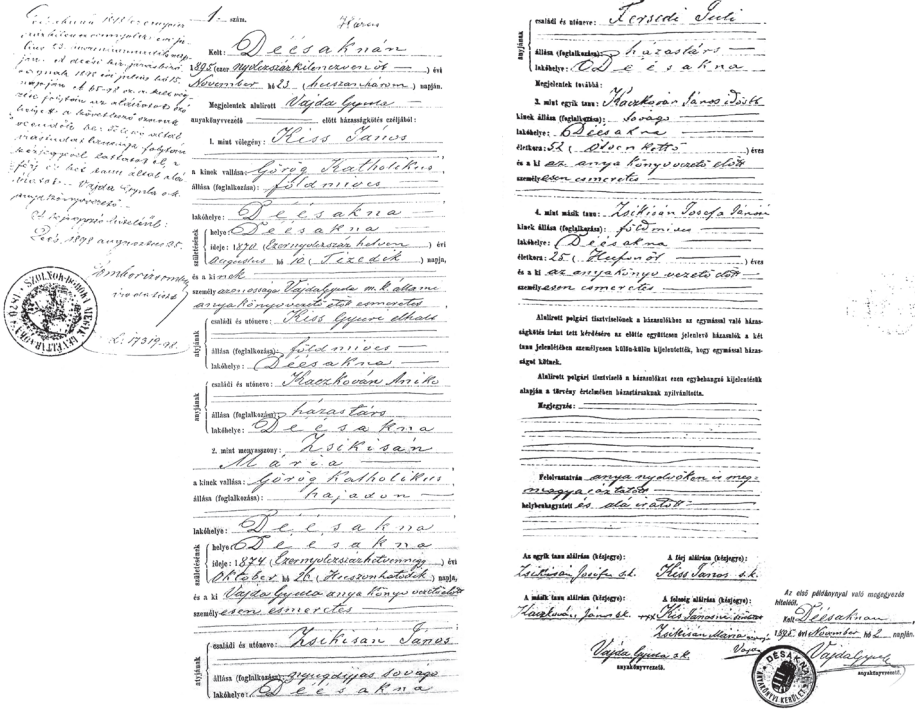
SOURCE: SJAN Cluj, Civil Status Registrations Collection, Cj-F-017-107, The Civil Status Registration for Married Couples in Ocna-Dej, 1895–1901, fols. 1–2.

Death Registrations

A COMPARATIVE MACROANALYSIS regarding deaths shows that the figures from the two types of registers completely coincide: 384 deceased in the civil register—of which four Israelite people—and 380 deceased in the three denominational registers.

Regarding the Greek Catholic community, as indicated in fig. 8, the table header requires information on the date of death and of the funeral, the name and status of the deceased person, the place of birth and the residence, data on relatives (husband, parents, tutors), the gender of the deceased, legitimacy, religion, age, the cause of death or the manner of death, offering the holy liturgies for special occasions, the place of burial, whether there is a death certificate and, finally the observations column. So, if the data had been filled in as per the requirements, we would have had a very complex picture of each registration, with

useful data for various types of analyses, also valuable for the family restoration process. The same type of information is required for the burial registration of the Reformed community (fig. 9).

Fig. 8. Table header for death registration, register of deaths for the Greek Catholic parish, Ocna-Dej, 1895–

SOURCE: SJAN Cluj, Parish Registrations Collection, Ocna-Dej, 177 (14).

Fig. 9. Table header for death registration, register of deaths for the Reformed parish, Ocna-Dej, 1895–

SOURCE: SJAN Cluj, Parish Registrations Collection, Ocna-Dej, 177 (15).

Fig. 10. Table header for death registration, register of deaths for the Catholic parish, Ocna-Dej, 1895–

SOURCE: SJAN Cluj, Parish Registrations Collection, Ocna-Dej, 177 (18).

As compared to the other registers, that of the Catholic community does not mention the age of the deceased, and this is ticked within the age categories which have separate columns—infant mortality, under four years old, between 4 and 20 years old, 20–40 years old, 40–65 years old and over 65 years old—which complicates the subsequent analyses. Instead of the cause of death, there are two great categories—natural death and violent death, with some causes which were probably the most frequent, since they were mentioned as such (natural, as a result of some epidemics, smallpox, rabies, or due to violence—suicide, murder). Data on granting the last holy liturgies for special occasions and, of course, the place of burial and the officiant are required in this case as well.

FIG. 11. DEATH REGISTRATION, CIVIL REGISTER OF OCNA-DEJ

SOURCE: SJAN Cluj, Civil Status Registrations Collection, Cj-F-017-108, The Civil Status Registration for the Deceased from Ocna-Dej, 1895–1901, fol. 1.

The civil registration of the dead mostly offers the same type of information on the death and the deceased as the parish registers, additionally mentioning the time of death. Information on the medical services or on the death findings by the doctor/death inspector is provided, as a rule, within the Observations column, the certificate lacking a special column for these details. It can be seen that, besides the standard information required by the document, the officer inserted into the empty part some information which had been deemed relevant—for instance, the fact that a deceased person was moved from Dej (Dés, Desch) to Ocna-Dej with the authorities' agreement or that he/she was undergoing medical treatment under the supervision of the salt mine doctor.

Conclusions

THE FIVE years' analysis of the civil and parish registration patterns of the community in Ocna-Dej has revealed that, at the level of the information required to be filled in, the parish registers are remarkable for their greater complexity and for providing some extremely relevant indicators for the investigation of social history and historical demography, irrespective of whether we refer to life courses or to family restoration analyses. The civil registers introduced after 1895, compared to the parish registers regarded as official documents up to that date, do not record the following: information on the legitimacy of the newborn (only the information about the father refers to the legitimate father) in the case of birth registrations; no reference to vaccination is made; information on the civil status upon marriage is missing; information on witnesses—although generally two witnesses are mentioned, in the case of the Orthodox married couples the researcher no longer has access to the information on the godparents, an all-important issue for the Orthodox marriage rituals extremely useful in analyzing the social networks.

From the perspective of record overlaps, the biggest differences, 25 in number, come from the births category. A possible explanation is that the priests recorded within their registers the births, actually the baptism of the newborn, but they did not survive and, most probably, the parents no longer recorded the birth with the civil status officer. It may also be a simple omission, subsequently rectified, by adding the newly born in the registers after 1900. One can only assume that the introduction of the civil legislation was not immediately and completely followed by compliance with the new state of affairs, and that at least a part of the population changed its habits with more difficulty. If baptism, as a

holy sacrament, used to be one of the main worries upon a new birth, the fear of death would also make the parents, priests or midwives, in special cases, perform this ritual as soon as possible after birth, just in case. Recording the newborn with the civil status officer may not have occurred in all cases with the same diligence. Michail Oros, for instance, the illegitimate son of Crişca Oros, born on 3 September 1896, is not recorded in the newborn civil registration of Ocna-Dej. The name of Ştefanu Gheţie, born on 19 April 1896 and who died one day later, on 20 April 1896, was not recorded in any of the civil status registers, meaning that, as he died, the parents no longer registered him.

As to marriages, it has been found out that in the years when the civil laws began to be enforced, there are some cases, not very many, when people got married either only before the church or before the civil status officer. The children of civil married couples are recorded as illegitimate within the church registrations, and their parents as partners. The greatest overlap appears in the case of recording the deceased, both from the perspective of the number of recordings (following the logic that for the infants not registered upon birth, no registration of death was required with the civil status), and from that of the type of information required.

An observation required from the first comparative viewpoint of the two types of registrations is related to the Hungarian pattern imposed on the Romanian names, both phonetically and especially by replacing the Romanian names with their Hungarian correspondents or close to them: Iosif Teuşan became József Teusán, Nicolai Rogojan became Miklós Rogozsán, Dumitru Someşan became Demeter Szomesán, Alexiu Sierban became Elek Serbán, to name just a few.

In conclusion, an analysis of the first years of implementing the civil registration as concerns the private life events shows that, in general, the events are recorded at both levels, and that the civil registrations, despite levelling the information required from the declarant, leave out some information extremely useful to social historical reconstruction. The observations deriving from this brief comparative analysis of the two types of registrations can confirm, if needed, that the civil status parish registers provide complex information for the researcher and can be successfully used, being recommended for usage for the period after 1895 as well, in order to complete the information from the civil registers. What is left, of course, is the great issue of the discrepancy between the information required in the registration and what was actually filled in, an issue directly imputable to those in charge of keeping these records and to the superior courts, with supervisory authority, which in several parishes or in case

of several registrations closed their eyes as concerns the defective manner of filling in the information. Still, where the registers were conscientiously filled in, they are extremely complex sources for social history.

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Notes

1. For the civil status registrations in Transylvania, see Liviu Moldovan, "Registrele confesionale de stare civilă din Transilvania," *Revista Arhivelor* (Bucharest), new ser., 1, 1 (1958): 159–185; Sorina Paula Bolovan, *Familia în satul românesc din Transilvania: A doua jumătate a secolului al XIX-lea şi începutul secolului XX*, foreword by Simion Retegan (Cluj-Napoca: Fundaţia Culturală Română, Centrul de Studii Transilvane, 1999); Mircea Brie, "Registrele parohiale de stare civilă din Transilvania în a doua jumătate a secolului al XIX-lea: Semnificaţie documentară," in *Interpretazioni del documento storico: Valore documentario e dimensioni letterarie*, edited by Dan Octavian Cepraga and Sorin Şipoş (Oradea: Editura Universităţii din Oradea, 2010), 164–193.
2. Historical Population Database of Transylvania, Center for Population Studies, Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania. The public, genealogical interface is available at hpdt.ro.
3. The latest work providing complex and synthetical data on the evolution of this type of documents, highlighting the complexity of the information provided and the manner in which it was organized, is the book by Angela Lumezeanu, *Infrastructuri digitale pentru istoria socială: Construirea bazelor de date istorice* (Cluj-Napoca: Mega, 2021).
4. The previous interrogations of civil registrations—see Luminiţa Dumănescu, *Transilvania copiilor: Dimensiunea demografică a copilăriei la românii ardeleni (1857–1910)*, foreword by Sorin Mitu (Cluj-Napoca: Argonaut, 2006)—considered, mainly, filling in the information regarding localities and individuals after 1895 starting from the premise that, within the parish registers, there is a decrease, at least in the first phase of implementing Laws XXX–XXXIV, in the number of registrations and implicitly the in the possibilities to retrace the individual paths and destinies.
5. Traian Rotariu, ed., Maria Semeniuc, and Elemér Mezei, *Recensământul din 1900: Transilvania* (n.p.: Staff, 1999), 256.
6. Luminiţa Dumănescu and Ioan Bolovan, "'From the Cradle to the Grave I Am My Father's Daughter!' Women and Their Married Names in Transylvania in the Second Half of the 19th Century," *The History of the Family* 26, 3 (2021): 466–481.
7. Erzsébet Fercsik, "The Traditional and Modern Forms of Hungarian Female Matrimonial Names," in *I Nomi nel tempo e nello spazio: Atti del XXII Congresso Internazionale di Scienze Onomastiche: Pisa, 28 agosto–4 settembre 2005*, vol. 4, edited by Maria Giovanna Arcamone, Donatella Bremer, Davide De Camilli, and Bruno Porcelli (Pisa: ETS, 2010), 131–140.

Abstract

Vital Registrations at the Turn of the 20th Century: A Comparison between Parish and Civil Records in Transylvania After 1895

The main purpose of this paper is to examine the differences between parish registers and the civil registration carried out in Transylvania in 1895 in what concerns the required data about individuals. The approach was based on a sample consisting of both types of registers belonging to Ocna-Dej, analyzed for the period 1895–1900. The main conclusion of the comparative analysis is that the main advantage of the civil records is the uniformization of data and, obviously, a more accurate data registration. Still, the parish registers remain richer sources of information, extremely valuable for social history.

Keywords